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Follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women and to the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly, entitled "Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century": implementation of strategic objectives and action in critical areas of concern and further actions and initiatives

Statement submitted by Coalition against Trafficking in Women, Company of the Daughters of Charity of St. Vincent de Paul, Congregation of Our Lady of Charity of the Good Shepherd, Congregations of Saint Joseph, Franciscans International, Grail, International Presentation Association of the Sisters of the Presentation of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Salesian Missions, Society of Catholic Medical Missionaries, Temple of Understanding, UNANIMA International and VIVAT International, non-governmental organizations in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

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Statement*

1. The theme of the fifty-fifth session of the Commission on the Status of Women raises complex issues surrounding education, use of technology and employment bringing together promise and deception. On the one hand, if women and girls have access to education, training, science and technology, the promise of full employment and decent work can be fulfilled. On the other hand, when women and girls are denied access to education and training and the tools of science and technology are instead used to exploit them, besides living in poverty, they are deceived, enslaved and exploited.

2. The United Nations has already accepted strong and positive policies to support the implementation of the access related to this session's theme. The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) affirms the rights of women in rural areas to appropriate technology. The Beijing Platform for Action speaks of their right to the provision of information, opportunities and assistance. The Commission on the Status of Women has asserted their rights to access to and control over technology. The World Summit on the Information Society speaks of their right to participation in technology. Resolutions in the Economic and Social Council promote the provision of broadband connectivity for low income and poor women, women living in poverty and women entrepreneurs, particularly in rural and remote areas.

3. Certainly two of the technologies that have most affected change in the lives of those who have access to them are the mobile phone and the computer with Internet access. On the positive side, these technologies have enabled producers to track prices in neighbouring markets enabling them to go to the market with the best price for their goods. Information and Communications Technologies (ICTs) have expanded the possibility for education and training on a variety of topics in a way which allows access to education that is possible anywhere in the world. On the negative side ICTs have become a tool of exploitation linking sex traffickers and buyers of women and girls for sexual exploitation. They have spread pornographic images of women and girls far wider and with more general distribution than would have been possible prior to the ICT era. These technologies have been used to promote modern slavery resulting in the expansion of trafficking of women and girls.[1] These technologies provide for opportunity or exploitation[2] according to who is using them.

4. While these technologies are becoming more and more widespread the digital divide between those who have access because of their resources and those who do not is becoming wider and wider. Millions of people are missing out on the technological revolution and the majority of these are women and girls. Research by the Cherie Blair Foundation lists five factors that influence women's mobile phone ownership: household income, age, occupation, educational levels and whether they live in an urban area or not.[3]

* Issued without formal editing.

[1] See the work of Gail Dines regarding pornography in the media of today's ICT revolution.

[2] *Because I am a Girl, the State of the World's Girls 2010: Digital and Urban Frontiers — Girls in a Changing Landscape*, p. 101.

[3] Ibid., p. 102.

5. The non-governmental organizations contributing to this statement are present in some of the poorest and most isolated parts of Asia, Africa and Latin America. Women and girls in these regions struggle continuously with lack of access to information and communication technologies. If ICTs are available, and they frequently are not, their cost is extremely high — beyond the means of the women and girls who live in situations of chronic, or even transitory, poverty. These women and girls lack food security, clean water, education, health care, and constantly face the challenges of maternal mortality, family care and the many daily chores needed to keep the family fed and clothed.

6. For many, technology frees up time for educational and leisure pursuits. However, for these women and girls even simple technology such as energy efficient solar cookers, solar lamps, and agricultural equipment, is out of reach. The poverty traps are further compounded by lack of education and training and female illiteracy.

7. Women and girls living in poverty are held captive to the lack of political will to address the structural changes that can reduce the negative effects of patriarchy, corporate and individual greed fuelled by globalization, and social and cultural practices which discriminate against women and girls.

8. Technology ought to be a way to break out of poverty for women and girls. Instead access to technology is about power and control. In patriarchal societies it is controlled by men. Even in their school days boys are educated to explore and conquer the world while girls are directed into school work that teaches them only how to care for others. They are told that science and technology is for boys while sewing and hair-dressing are for girls.[4]

9. In conclusion, we believe that it is possible for ICT to live up to its promise for women and girls, especially those who live in poverty and in rural areas. We also believe that ICT usage to deceive, abuse and exploit women and girls is not inevitable. We invite all stakeholders, the United Nations, Governments, civil society, corporate business and individuals, to take the steps necessary to fulfil the promise:

- Research and share good practices that have resulted in improved access to ICT technology and the training of school age girls in ICT coupled with an improvement in their quality of life. Scale these up especially for women and girls living in poverty and in rural and remote areas.[5]
- Research the use of modern technologies — particularly the mobile phone and the computer — as tools to enslave women and children and in some cases men in sexual exploitation and forced labour. Look particularly for good practices used by law enforcement, Governments, civil society and other stakeholders to reduce the exploitative aspects with a view to eliminating the demand generated by these tools.
- Study the results of educational modules used to raise awareness of the above practices and also the results of any specific laws or regulations both in the

[4] This point is argued cogently in Plan International quoting "Bridging the gender divide: how technology can advance women economically", ICRW (2010), and "The second digital divide and young women", Cecilia Castaño, Universidad Complutense de Madrid (2008), p. 112.

[5] http://www.invenco.org/?q=sisters-casestudy, Primary school case study.

technology industry and in educational programmes in preventing these abuses. Educators such as the Coalition against Trafficking in Women members in Mexico City and in the Philippines have developed strong and effective programmes which include such education both for women and girls and men and boys.[6]

- Carry out significant research in settings where technology has been used as a force to reduce or eliminate the exploitation of women and girls. Examine laws, regulations and other technologies that can promote the promise of technologies rather than deception and abuse. Through various human rights bodies such as the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women and the Committee on the Rights of the Child promote the dissemination of these practices and encourage corporations in these industries to become involved in their positive use.

[6] See http://catwinternational.org/ for descriptions of these programmes and contact information for those running the programmes.